

What's In It For Me? Infrastructure & Jobs Act
Together We Build, December 29, 2021
by Thomas Beck, AIA, NCARB

On November 15, 2021, President Biden signed H.R. 3684, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), into law. A complete overview of the winding road this bill took before becoming Public Law No: 117-58 can be found at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/3684/all-actions>. There are many good things IIJA will accomplish for everyday Americans. An informal straw poll of our family over the holidays revealed that the number one benefit perceived by them is the increased availability of broadband. And some family members said they did not really know enough about the contents of the bill, despite being well informed news readers. We thought a positive way to end 2021 would be to look at some of the substantial details of this congressional accomplishment.

We found many good resources for factual summaries of the contents of IIJA, including from Investopedia, the Highway Administration, and many others. A detailed 129 page summary of the contents of IIJA can be found at this link:

<https://www.cantwell.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Infrastructure%20Investment%20and%20Jobs%20Act%20-%20Section%20by%20Section%20Summary.pdf>

We found the National Association of Counties (NACO) summary to be concise and well designed. According to NACO, IIJA distributes federal funds totaling \$973 billion over 5 years. Of that total, \$550 billion is for new investments “on top of what the federal government already spends on programs.”

“The \$550 billion in new investments is broken down as follows:

Transportation: \$284 billion (U.S. Department of Transportation)

Water: \$55 billion (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)

Broadband: \$65 billion (U.S. Department of Commerce)

Energy & Power: \$73 billion (U.S. Department of Energy)

Environmental remediation: \$21 billion (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)

Western water infrastructure: \$8.3 billion (U.S. Department of the Interior; U.S. Department of Agriculture - U.S. Forest Service)

Resiliency: \$46 billion (U.S. Department of Homeland Security)

The IIJA directs \$284 billion (52 percent) of the \$550 billion in new investments toward modernizing and making improvements across all modes of transportation, with the majority of funding reserved for highways, roads and bridges:

Roads & Bridges: \$110 billion

Transit: \$39 billion

Rail: \$66 billion

Safety: \$11 billion

Airports: \$25 billion

Ports & Waterways: \$17 billion

Electric vehicle chargers: \$7.5 billion

Electric buses: \$7.5 billion

Reconnecting Communities: \$1 billion”

(<https://www.naco.org/resources/legislative-analysis-counties-infrastructure-investment-jobs-act>)

NACO says “Counties play a major role in America's transportation and infrastructure network, owning and operating 44 percent of public roads and 38 percent of bridges -- more than any other level of government. Simultaneously, counties directly support 78 percent of public transit systems and 34 percent of airports that keep our residents connected in every corner of the country. Each year, counties

invest \$134 billion in the construction of infrastructure and the maintenance and operation of public works.”

IJJA provides grants to states for broadband deployment of \$42.45 billion in FY 2022. Each state will get a minimum of \$100 million for broadband. Colorado officials estimate Colorado’s amount could be up to \$1 billion. IJJA includes \$14.2 billion to modify and extend assistance to households struggling to afford broadband internet. (<https://www.fcc.gov/affordable-connectivity-program>)

IJJA includes funding for drinking water and clean water \$14.65 billion over 5 years; FEMA \$1 billion; weatherization assistance \$3.5 billion FY 2022; \$5 billion over 5 years to support activities reducing impact of extreme weather, wildfire and disaster on the electric grid; \$2.5 billion over 5 years for charging and fueling infrastructure; \$6.42 billion over 5 years for carbon reduction to facilitate non-motorized users of the road (such as trails) among other carbon reduction strategies.

Locally, “Colorado is projected to receive \$3.7 billion for roads, \$225 million for bridge repairs and replacements and \$917 million for public transit, among other things.”

(<https://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/local-news/colorado-set-to-receive-billions-from-federal-infrastructure-package-for-roads-internet-more>) John Hickenlooper’s RECHARGE Act made it into the final version of IJJA. It is focused on making EVs more affordable and “It also accelerates the development of more EV charging stations across the country. Colorado is expected to see \$57 million over five years in funding for that venture.”

A press release from Hickenlooper’s office welcomes “an initial \$121,347,000 from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for water infrastructure projects” which will help upgrade our aging water infrastructure. (<https://www.hickenlooper.senate.gov/press-releases/hickenlooper-bennet-welcome-first-funding-headed-to-colorado-from-bipartisan-infrastructure-bill/>)

Colorado Public Radio outlines some of the Colorado benefits from IJJA. (<https://www.cpr.org/2021/11/08/colorado-transportation-projects-infrastructure-bill-funding/>) Among the projects which may be partially funded is Amtrak’s planned Fort Collins to Colorado Springs new rail service. (<https://www.cpr.org/2021/04/12/biden-infrastructure-bill-amtrak-front-range-passenger-rail/>)

In the area of broadband the Colorado Sun covers many positive Colorado benefits. (<https://coloradosun.com/2021/11/11/colorado-digital-divide-rural-broadband-infrastructure-bill/>) The article includes a table that outlines money currently in Colorado broadband projects, sourced from the Colorado Broadband Office (<https://broadband.colorado.gov/broadband-in-colorado>). That office counts 93% of rural Colorado as served by broadband (at least 25 megabits per second download speed and 3mbps upload speed) as of November 2021. The article notes that this may not be accurate. (At a glance we checked our home address on <https://gis.colorado.gov/broadbandviewer/> and the data it shows does not accurately reflect our current fixed wireless 9 mbps download speed outside Estes Park town limits.)

“Much of the broadband piece of the bill also comes from a local source: Sen. Michael Bennet’s proposed BRIDGE Act, (<https://www.bennet.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/press-releases?id=A74E4E17-00BD-4428-B9EE-42B1CADE6C37>) which proposed \$40 billion in flexible spending for the states to deploy broadband infrastructure.” The article highlights a broadband program from The Colorado Broadband Fund, which takes applications twice a year. (<https://broadband.colorado.gov/broadband-deployment-board-fund/broadband-fund>) Of local interest a grant of \$64,627.03 was awarded for “last mile infrastructure” to provide coverage for 171 households in Larimer County’s Big Elk Meadows neighborhood.

We agree that one of the most impactful elements of the new law will be the increased access to high-speed broadband. Our Democrat controlled House, Senate, and White House can get things done to help all of us living in the United States of America, and have demonstrated this by passing this legislation. We hope 2022 will bring more good legislation to benefit us all.

Beck, Thomas W., Together We Build, "What's In It For Me? Infrastructure & Jobs Act", *Estes Park Trail Gazette*, Friday, December 31, 2021, <https://www.eptail.com/2021/12/29/together-we-build-whats-in-it-for-me-infrastructure-jobs-act/>